

In Memoriam

**Brigadier-General
Richard Dale Benson**

National Guard of Pennsylvania

RETIRED

Senior Vice-Commander Veteran Corps

First Regiment Infantry, N. G. P.

1894-1920



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Walter Gordon.

MINUTE

ADOPTED BY THE

Veteran Corps, First Regiment Infantry

National Guard of Pennsylvania

AT THE

Quarterly Communication, October 8, 1920

AT THE

FIRST REGIMENT ARMORY

Broad and Callowhill Streets

Philadelphia

HEADQUARTERS
VETERAN CORPS
FIRST INFANTRY, N. G. P.

Philadelphia, August 31, 1920.

General Orders
No. 7

- I. The Commander announces with profound sorrow the death of
Comrade **BRIGADIER GENERAL R. DALE BENSON**
Senior Vice Commander of the Veteran Corps, First Infantry, N. G. P.
- II. His service was as follows:
Private Commonwealth Artillery, April 24, 1861.
Second Lieutenant 114th Penna. Volunteers, August 11, 1862.
First Lieutenant, January 1, 1863.
A. D. C. Staff of General Charles K. Graham at the battle of Gettysburg. Honorably mustered out May 29, 1865, and brevetted Major U. S. Volunteers for conspicuous gallantry at the battle of Chancellorsville, Va.
Adjutant, First Regiment Infantry N. G. P., January 22, 1868.
Major, February 29, 1868.
Lieutenant Colonel, December, 1868.
Colonel, June 4, 1873.
Resigned, December 4, 1877.
Brigadier General National Guard of Penna. Retired, 1912.
Senior Vice Commander of the Veteran Corps, April 28, 1894. Unanimously re-elected each successive year until the present time, declining to accept the command, although commanding the Corps during the year after the death of General Wiedersheim.

III. The Veteran Corps has lost a beloved Commander, the gallant soldier, the distinguished citizen, to whom no laurels have been alluring and no reward a temptation beyond the self-consciousness of duty well and truly done. A master of discipline, a master of strategy, a master of the confidence of men, a master of the comrade's love.
Well done, thou good and faithful servant,

RICHARD DALE BENSON

IV. The members of the Corps are invited to attend the funeral services at the Tenth Presbyterian Church, Seventeenth and Spruce Streets, on Thursday morning, September 2, 1920, at 11 o'clock.

V. The colors of the Veteran Corps will be appropriately draped for thirty days from the date of death, August 29th, and the flag at the Armory be displayed at half-staff on the day of interment.

By order of

Commander J. CAMPBELL GILMORE,
STEPHEN FUGUET, Adjutant.

MINUTE

PRESENTED BY

MAJOR-GENERAL JAMES W. LATTA

This minute is made by the Veteran Corps, First Regiment Infantry, National Guard of Pennsylvania, in commemoration of the rich and rare contribution that has been made to the business, the morals, the religion and the laws of the country by General Richard Dale Benson, in war and peace, through all the years of the three-quarters of a century of a life of patriotic, conscionable and substantial usefulness.

General Benson, son of Gustavus S. and Margaretta FitzGerald Dale Benson, was born at Philadelphia, December 6, 1841, and died after a protracted illness at Ventnor, New Jersey, August 29, 1920. His father, of high repute in business and finance, at one time a member of the Board of City Trusts, was one of the founders of the banking house of Alexander Benson & Company, a firm long since retired, but through its lengthy active business life a distinctive Third Street landmark. Richard Benson, the grandfather of General Benson, came to Philadelphia from Maryland in his early life, accumulating as years progressed a handsome competence in mercantile pursuits.

The Benson forebears were early comers, settled in Talbot County, Maryland, won distinction as officers of the line in the Colonial Wars and the War of the Revolution, and in later years one Perry Benson, who had been a captain in the Revolution, was made a major general and assigned to Maryland troops in the War of 1812. A brick mansion erected in the seventeenth century out of imported brick still stands on the old family site. Nearby is a private family burying ground.

General Benson, after a preliminary preparation in private schools, with a concluding course at the Episcopal Academy, entered the University of Pennsylvania. He was graduated from that institution in the class of 1860 while he was yet in his nineteenth year. Soon afterward he was made a clerk in a wholesale grocery house.

Less than a year was to elapse between his graduation and the Civil War. Impelled by his own patriotic instincts and loyal convictions, bred of an ancestral storied past, General Benson made prompt response to the President's call to arms in April of 1861, and on the 24th of that month enlisted as a private in the Commonwealth Artillery. The command was promptly sent to reinforce the Garrison at Fort Delaware, where it remained until August 5, 1861, when, its term of service having expired, the company was honorably mustered out.

It was soon found that the country needed longer enlistments and more of them. Instinct and inspiration were still impelling forces, and General Benson's military life soon became the more expansive. He is next found mustered in not for three months but for three years, not as a private soldier but as an officer of the line as a second lieutenant of infantry, then as a first lieutenant of infantry in Company B of the 114th Pennsylvania and not discharged from the service until he was honorably mustered out on May 29, 1865. His career was continuous from August 11, 1862, the date of his muster in, to the date of his discharge. It covered a period of two years and nine months. Altogether, including his first enlistment, a full three years term. It had something of a brilliant opening. In his first battle, Chancellorsville, December 12, 1862, he was breveted "captain and major, U. S. V., for conspicuous gallantry at the battle of Chancellorsville, Va." On detached service on the staff of Brig. Gen. Charles A. Graham, who commanded the first brigade of the first division of the Third Army Corps, his separation from his regiment was not distinctively complete, as his regiment was attached to that brigade. His best opportunity came to him to win his spurs at Gettysburg, where he was the brigade acting assistant adjutant general, and where Gen. Chas. A. Graham was wounded and taken prisoner.

A test of battle endurance was an experience which came in rich illustration to the participant in the three days fighting at Gettysburg. To have been actively engaged at Gettysburg in the affair at the Peach Orchard, a well-remembered sub-division of that engagement, was a military career of itself. It was General Benson's opportunity to have been present at and actively participating in that combat on detached service as acting assistant adjutant general of the First Brigade.

Brief extracts from the official reports will best testify to the severity and the general character of the engagement. General Birney, who commanded the division to which General Graham's brigade was attached, says in his official report: "The First Brigade, composed of Pennsylvania regiments, was commanded by Brig. Gen. C. K. Graham, who tried with his skeleton ranks to even outdo Chancellorsville. General Graham was wounded and fell into the hands of the enemy. . . . The 57th Pa., Col. Sides; 63d Pa., Maj. Danks; 68th Pa., Col. Tippin; 105th Pa., Col. Craig; 114th Pa., Lt. Col. Cavada; and 141st Pa., Col. Madill, composed this brigade and have made its reputation equal to any in the army. General Graham showed the same coolness, daring and endurance under the terrible fire that distinguished him at Chancellorsville."

The loss in killed and wounded of the 141st was 72 per cent.

Testimony directly from the ranks is always of a special value.

The following is from the oration of Private Alfred J. Craighead, delivered at the dedication of the 68th's monument at Gettysburg: "In that

orchard we received the enemy's heavy charge and musketry fire, and bravely did the boys of our regiment return that fire with telling effect with every volley. It was a terrible afternoon in that orchard and we were all anxious for reinforcements to come up, as we were being decimated by their artillery, the loss sustained by our regiment was about 60 per cent. . . . Near the close of the action General Graham, having returned upon the field, attempted to resume command, but being weak from loss of blood and unable to endure the trials of that desperately contested field fell into the hands of the enemy and was taken prisoner, together with a number of our regiment's men."

Extracts from the oration of Lt. Col. Edward Roscoe Bowen, 114th Pa., who delivered the address at the dedication of the 114th's monument on the Gettysburg battlefield:

"Lieutenant R. Dale Benson, Co. B, though not technically present with the regiment, was present at Gettysburg, serving on the staff of General Graham, commanding the brigade, and in that position rendered valuable and valiant service." . . .

. . . "The active strength of the regiment, rank and file, was less than 400." . . . "At this juncture Captain Randolph, chief of artillery of the Third Army Corps, rode up to the regiment, saying: 'You boys saved this battery at Fredericksburg, and if you will do it again move forward.'" . . .

. . . "The regiment sprang forward with alacrity, passed through and to the front of the battery, which hastily limbered up and got to the rear. . . . During all this we were receiving a terrible musketry fire from the rapidly approaching enemy, and men were falling by scores."

. . . "The advance of the enemy was checked at dark and we sank down where we were, utterly exhausted." . . .

. . . The well-remembered characteristic phrase, said to be of the coinage of the imperial Cæsar, "All of which I was and part of which I saw," might be so paraphrased as to read, "A part of which I was and all of which I saw," and as so transposed justly applied to Benson at the Peach Orchard.

General Benson was appointed a commissioner on the Pennsylvania Commission on the occasion of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg, July 4, 1911.

The consensus of historical opinion is rather the embodiment of the judgment of a people than the mere expression of the thoughts of a writer who has recorded a public conclusion and not merely given expression to his own views. What history has said of General Benson, and it has much more to say than has yet been disclosed in this memorial tribute, may therefore be safely accepted as a conclusion of his time as a part of the story of the days in which he led and commanded in whatever sphere it was his lot to have been an active participant. General Benson, honorably mus-

tered out of the volunteer service of the army of the United States May 29, 1865, entered the service of the National Guard of Pennsylvania as the adjutant of the First Regiment Infantry January 22, 1868, was rapidly promoted through the ranks of major and lieutenant colonel and ultimately to the colonelcy June 4, 1873. This office he held until December 4, 1877, when, upon the tender of his resignation, he was honorably discharged. Centennial anniversaries, inaugurations, riots, disturbances, checkered his career, its historic conclusion culminating in the industrial railroad disturbances of 1877.

Personal judgment had not been slow in accrediting Colonel Benson with such capacity, reliability, skill and courage—he had been tested in war in subordinate rank—as to show that he might safely be trusted anywhere and everywhere, where only the wisest and best could be depended upon to face the gravest responsibilities. This personal judgment had its fullest confirmation when Colonel Benson, in command of the First Regiment in the railroad riots of 1877, faced, mastered and confronted as serious a responsibility as probably any officer ever faced when suddenly called to meet in moments of profound peace, a mob defiant for riot and determined on bloodshed, a situation such as Colonel Benson confronted on that occasion in the railroad round house at Pittsburgh on the night of July 21, 1877. It had something of a significance as the sixteenth anniversary of the first Bull Run, made further impressive as both events happened on a Sunday. An official report of the division speaks thus of the withdrawal on the morning of the 22nd: “After a night of successful resistance against furious assaults, Colonel Benson had a skirmish line in front and the coolness and steadiness of the regiment as they marched out was the admiration even of our enemies. I never saw them on parade in their own city preserve better formation.”

No happier conception of English speech was ever uttered than was that of Colonel Clayton McMichael on the regiment's thirty-fourth anniversary celebration, April 19, 1895. When speaking of Colonel Benson he made this reference to his participation in the affair at the round house: “Who familiar with every surrounding danger and with his own body ever nearest to the foe, led his men through the jaws of brutal ambush into the tiger blooded mob with the same calm assurance with which he had displayed their proficiency on dress parade.”

It would have been a serious omission if such a well-deserved tribute delivered so opportunely had not place been reserved here for its reproduction.

Reports on the round house speak in heroic terms of the mob. “The individual courage of some of the rioters was remarkable and there were many exhibitions of reckless daring that we could not refrain from admiring.”

And again from Colonel Benson's official report, a report constructed with a military precision that most worthily commends it, it is stated: “Con-

siderable exchange of shots took place between the troops and the mob during the night, but the mob was unable to fire the piece of artillery or remove it, owing to the skillful and effective manner in which the men on duty kept it covered and a number of the mob lost their lives in attempting to regain the piece. Rifle firing from the cover of a boardyard opposite the round house, which was accurate and constant, was trying to the men but was ineffective."

General Benson's resignation as colonel of the First Regiment bears date of December 4, 1877. By operation of law he passed from the colonelcy of the First Regiment on the active list to the retired roll of the National Guards of Pennsylvania with the rank of brigadier general.

The following paragraph is the concluding tribute of history to General Benson's severance from the body of soldiery that he had served so well and whose care and purpose for their advancement and reputation they had so thoroughly appreciated.

"With his keen sense of good order, decorum and business, his cool courage in emergency, his wisdom in purpose and skill in performance, his constancy in friendship, his acute military instinct, his wide influence with men of finance and the respect he commanded from the public at large, his unremitting attention to every duty; his confidence in his men and their confidence in him made his loss not irreparable, as no loss ever is, but one indeed of much concern." The cheers and applause that in after years greeted his presence whenever he was in attendance, and the regiment not under discipline that forbade it, clearly demonstrated that he left behind him a personal potential reminiscence fully commensurate with his historic measurements.

General Benson never wholly severed all connection with the regiment. A charter member of the Veteran Corps, he was its senior vice-commander at the time of his decease, and while so acting was at times repeatedly in command of the Corps.

Every man who drew sabre, carried a rifle or rode a caisson has his place in history. It is only the conspicuous few, who as well a necessary part as the inconspicuous many, who are to be of war's survivors, who are to appear in their more distinctive individuality. Capacity, courage, fitness are essentials in the furtherance of such a distinctiveness. Opportunity, occasion, must as well present itself as the individual to fill it. The possessor of all things needful, nevertheless what the good soldier always covets, is the chance to prove himself equal to his opportunities. Benson was the happy possessor of all things that went to make the soldier and the man, and when the opportunity came was ready to seize it with an intelligent alacrity for the fulfillment of the duty he had so heroically assumed.

Commencing with the wool business with his honorable discharge from his military service in war, General Benson's business connections grew to be expansive and varied. His clear judgments, wise conclusions, thoughtful

considerations were ever at the command of his business associates, and from time to time and at all times throughout all his extended career he was brought into intimate participation with trade, commerce and finance as a director or manager of numerous corporations, notably the Salt Manufacturing Company, the Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington Railroad Company, North Pennsylvania Railroad, Catawissa Railroad, Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company, the Philadelphia National Bank, the Real Estate Trust Company, the Franklin Fire Insurance Company, the Merchant's Trust Company, and the Western Saving Fund Society. In the midst of all these acute activities he was elected to the presidency of the Pennsylvania Fire Insurance Company, continuing for many years to contribute to its well-earned high repute, ranking as it did and does as a recognized leader with the leading insurance companies in the country.

Of Benson it may be well said that no evil blurs his escutcheon, and in moments of reflection he could well review his life with every thought a blessed remembrance, no incident to be consigned to forgetfulness nor any recollection relegated to oblivion. He was of fine presence, attractive manner and convincing speech. Like the well proportioned platform orator, what he had to say was well said before it was said at all. A close and exact observer of his every obligation, he was a typical illustration of that phrase of ancient reverence, "His word was as good as his bond." His perceptions were keen, his vision clear, his zeal ardent. It was the demonstration of these activities that, without solicitation or persuasion, induced his associates not only to seek his counsel and advice, but as well to select him for management and direction. His Christian life was a model of his reverential appreciation of the self-imposed duties and obligations attendant upon his public acceptance of the faith and creed of the church of his adoption.

General Benson, elected July 20, 1866, was a life member of the Union League of Philadelphia—vice-president March 10, 1896, 1897, 1898; director 1894-1895 to March 1896-1916. Elected to the advisory Real Estate Board December 9, 1912; he was also a member of the Art Association. When he had completed the fiftieth year of his membership his fellow-members, in commemoration of the event and in recognition of his many and faithful services during all those extended years, tendered him a banquet. It was really a Benson night. The dining hall, filled to the limit of its capacity, rang in speech, recital, song and praise of his faithful friendships and worthy performances.

Elected January 5, 1881, Class 1, Insignia 2123, he was an original companion of the Commandery of the State of Pennsylvania of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States. Its commander May 2, 1917-1918. He was also a member of Post 2, of Philadelphia, Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Pennsylvania.

A member of the board of trustees of the Tenth Presbyterian Church and a trustee of the General Assembly, he was consistent, attentive, dutiful; his faith firm, his beliefs unquestioned, his works followed as the resultful effort of an ever-continuing Christian endeavor.

A member of the General Alumni Society of the University of Pennsylvania, he kept himself in continuous touch with his alma mater.

A patron of the arts as well as of club life, social and athletic, he was a member of the Art Club and also of the Philadelphia Country Club, Merion Cricket Club and Bachelor's Barge Club.

In 1869 General Benson married Mary Watson Eckert. Four children were born of this union. His wife's death and that of a daughter Maude preceded his. The three children who survive are Richard Dale Benson, Bertha Dale Benson and Mary Eleanor Benson, wife of T. Maxwell Merryweather, parents of the three grandchildren who also survive. Richard Dale Benson is a succession companion of the first class by inheritance of the Commandery of Pennsylvania of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States. He was also in the United States Navy during the world war, enlisting as a gunner's mate, second class, in the Naval Reserve, April 4, 1917, in response to an urgent call from the department for men to fill vacancies in that branch of service. He was honorably discharged as a chief petty officer in the gunnery division April 4, 1920.

“How shall we rank thee on glory's page,
Thou more than soldier and just less than sage.”
“And the tear that we shed, though in secret it rolls,
Shall long keep his memory green in our souls.”
—*Thomas Moore.*

By order of

Commander J. CAMPBELL GILMORE,
STEPHEN FUGUET, *Adjutant.*

